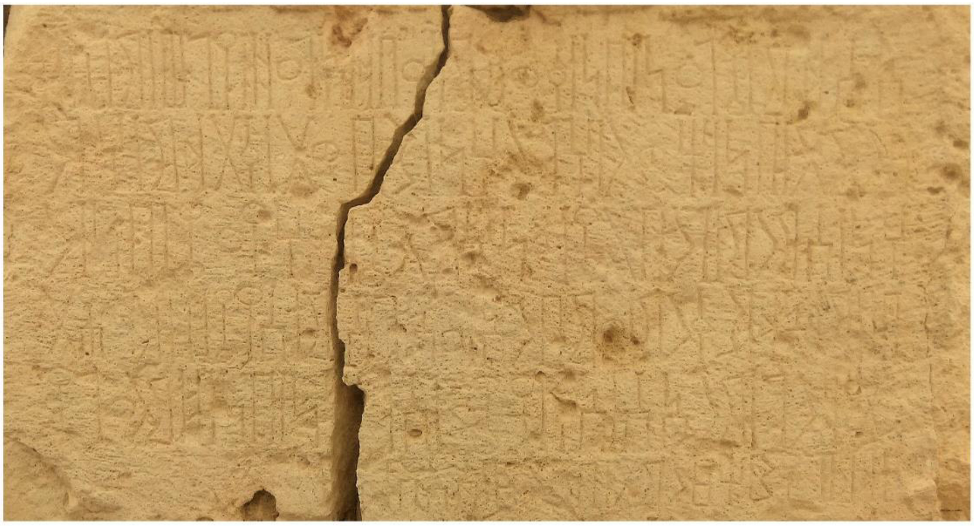
South Arabian Long-Distance Trade in Antiquity

"Out of Arabia"



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CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE PILGRIMAGE TO THE AWĀM-TEMPLE/MAḤRAM BILQĪS, MAʾRIB, YEMEN

MOHAMMED MARAQTEN

AUSTRIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

Abstract

This paper aims to present an outline of the institution of pilgrimage at the Awām Temple (Maḥram Bilqīs), at Maʾrib in Yemen, in light of recent epigraphic discoveries. In ancient Yemen, the Awām Temple played the role of the Kaʿba in Mecca. The Sabaean capital of Maʾrib was designated, just like Mecca, as a "holy town." Data about pilgrimages from ancient South Arabian inscriptions indicate both communal practices and rites exclusive to individual deities. After giving an outline of the sources and terminology relating to pilgrimage in ancient South Arabian inscriptions, this paper briefly discusses pilgrimage in ancient Yemen. It then concentrates on the pilgrimage to the Awām Temple, including the organization and rituals of pilgrimage, besides purity, the *manāsik al-ḥağğ* "ritual rules of pilgrimage," and processions, as well as the sacred time and the sacrifice.

Keywords: Awām Temple/Maḥram Bilqīs, Maʾrib, Yemen, pilgrimage, ancient South Arabian inscriptions, Sabaic

Introduction

The large, oval-shaped Awām Temple, now called by its modern name, Maḥram Bilqīs, was constructed by the Sabaeans at the edge of what is now a desert located in Maʾrib, ca. 120 km east of Ṣanʿāʾ (Fig. 19-1 and Fig. 19-2). It was constructed about the time of the first appearance of Sabaean culture, around the beginning of the first millennium BCE. The temple

continued to function down to the end of the 4th century CE. It was the central sanctuary of worship for the Sabaean national deity, Almaqah, and hence without a doubt the key focus of the notions of sacred space and sacred time in ancient Yemen. The temple consists of several structures. The main structure is the oval wall, which represents the main structure of the temple, namely the Oval Sanctuary Precinct; the length of this oval wall is 282 meters. An important feature of the Awām Temple is the row of eight pillars, constructed as a main entrance (Glanzman 2003: 183-98; Maraqten 2015: 107-33).



Fig. 19-1: General View of the Awām Temple/Maḥram Bilqīs.

The Awām Temple was a sacred space, oracle and pilgrimage sanctuary par excellence. This temple was not only a temple of healing, but also of "blessing." First of all, the Awām Temple was a place of "refuge," as deducible from its name, Awām (*ʾwm*), which means "protection, palace of refuge." This temple was thus a place of asylum. One of the most important functions of the Awām Temple was as a place of "thanksgiving." It provided a shelter for the ordinary people and suppliants to thank Almaqah, whom they believed to be responsible for safety, deliverance, protection and healing. There are several characteristics which prove that the Awām

Temple and its sacred conception was a *ḥaram* or *maḥram* and, therefore, make it similar to the *ḥaram* of Mecca (Maraqten 2015: 107-33; Robin 2018: 661-73).

Thanks to the excavations of the American Foundation for the Study of Man at the Awām Temple (1998-2006) under the direction of the late Mrs. Merilyn Phillips Hodgson, we know more about the architectural structure of the temple and religious practices at the Awām Temple. Nine seasons of excavation have now been carried out as part of the AFSM's renewed efforts, and discoveries have yielded dozens of inscriptions.

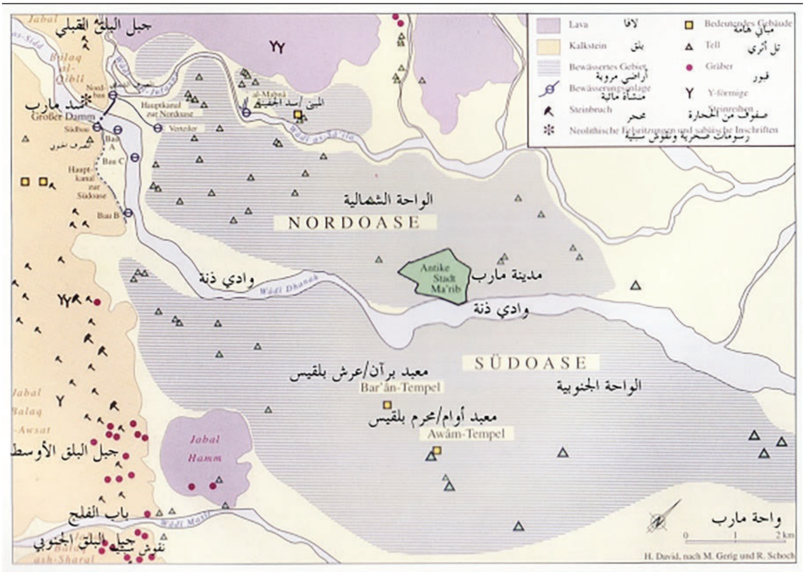


Fig. 19-2: Map of the Maʾrib oasis.

I. The sources and terminology of pilgrimage in ancient South Arabian Inscriptions

Our major source for studying the pilgrimage practices in ancient Yemen is the ancient South Arabian inscriptions. The languages of the ancient South Arabic group, namely Sabaic, Minaic, Qatabānic, and Ḥaḍramitic, are generally classified as ancient and are named after the kingdoms of Sabaʾ, Maʿīn, Qatabān and Ḥaḍramawt (Stein 2011: 1042-73). However, the Sabaean kingdom was the most powerful. These inscriptions date from the

beginning of the 1st millennium BCE until the eve of Islam (Robin 2015: 90-126).

Two types of texts are documented in ancient Yemen. The first genre is monumental inscriptions, which include votive and dedicatory texts, war reports and royal inscriptions, construction inscriptions, women's inscriptions, religious and literary inscriptions, legal documents, penitential and atonement inscriptions, and temple laws etc. The second genre is minuscule inscriptions.

A few thousand wooden sticks of these texts have been discovered in the past three decades (Drewes and Ryckmans 2016; Stein 2010; Maraqten 2014a). This type of text deals primarily with topics from everyday life including private letters, legal and business certificates, writing exercises, private contracts, inventory texts, receipts, promissory notes, texts from cult practice, as well as prayers and texts relating to pilgrimages (Maraqten 2014a:133-7).

Our main source is the Sabaic texts. A couple of these texts deal with pilgrimages. However, the data on pilgrimages is primarily mentioned within the context of the text. Some more data was gained from the Minaic, Qatabānic and Ḥaḍramitic texts. The practice of pilgrimage is expressed in several verbal forms and derived nouns. These are to be summarized as follows:

i. ḤḌR

Basically, three verbal stems are used with the meaning "to perform a pilgrimage," *hwfr*, *hḥḍr* (Sab. Dict.: 157 ff., 66; Ryckmans 1973: 36-9) and *ḥgg* (Sab. Dict.: 6).[1] The most attested verb used in Sabaic to express pilgrimage is the root /*ḥ-ḍ-r/.* For the etymology of *ḥḍr*, cf. Arabic *ḥaḍara* "to be present, be in the presence (of), attend."[2]

The Sabaic verbal form *hḥḍr* means "to celebrate a feast, to hold a festival for a deity, perform a pilgrimage," as well as "to offer;" (Sab. Dict.: 66; Schm/Sir 92/A.11); cf. the noun *ḥḍr* (pl. *ʾḥḍr*) "festival, pilgrimage" (Sab. Dict.: 66; MB 2004 I-63/5; Ir 37/12, Ja 651/17, Gl 1361/1; Schm/Sir 92/A.9; Schm/Sir 109/14.-15; CIH 79/4, CIH 82/4; MB 2004 I-109, see below). The infinitive form *hḥḍrn* is attested several times in Sabaic (NAM 2494/5, NAM 2494/8, NAM 2494/9, RES 4176/1, Schm/Sir 92/A.5). Further, see the Minaic *ḥḍr* "parvis" (LM, 47). The term *ḥḍr* "pilgrimage"

[1] Cf. the noun *ḥḍr* (root / *ḥ-ḍ-r*/) "to camp by water; to be present," see Al-Jallad and Jaworska 2020: 84. On *mwfrt ʾlmqh* "pilgrimage of Almaqah" (YM 375/5-6), see the discussion in LUNDIN 1987: 55-6, who interprets *wfr* as "to cultivate." This interpretation is untenable.

[2] Lane 1983: 589.

also occurs in Minaic (M 151/2 = RES 2929/2). Further, the Minaic term *ʾḥḍr* is also attested with the meaning of “religious festivals, pilgrimage ceremonies” (e.g., YM 28488 A/3; YM 28488 A/3) and s^{1}*ḥḍr* means “faire le pèlerinage” (Robin and Arbach 2013: 133). Further, see s^{1}*ḥḍr* in Qatabānic (CSAI 178). The term *mḥḍr* means “festival hall” and *mḥḍrt* means “a kind of altar” (Maraqten 1994: 169 ff.).

ii. WFR

WFR I refers to “perform pilgrimage, celebrate a feast” (Sab. Dict.: 157). Essentially, two verbal stems have the meaning “to perform a pilgrimage,” *hwfr* (Sab. Dict.: 157 ff.; Ryckmans 1973: 36-9). Mention should be made of the Semitic roots /*w-f-r*/, /*ʿ-m-r*/ and /*f-l-ḥ*/; Sabaic *hʿlṣ* “perform a *maʿlaṣ*-festival or ritual” (see below) both have the meaning to “cultivate” and “to worship” (Lundin 1987: 55-6).[3] A Sabaic inscription mentions *b-kl ḥḍrm w*-[*b-k*]*l mwfrm*, “in every feast and every pilgrimage” (Schm/Sir 109/14-15).

iii. ḤGG

The basic meaning of *ḥgg* in Semitic languages is “to celebrate a feast” or “to perform a pilgrimage” (Sab. Dict.: 6; FB-wādī Shuḍayf 3/4; CIH 547/6; Arbach 3, Arbach 1996: 247).[4]

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[3] Cf. WFR II. “cultivate” and *mwfr, mfr* “cultivated land” in Sabaic (Sab.Dict.: 66; DAI Ṣirwāḥ 2005-50/1); of interest is the phrase which reads; *kl wld ʿm wfr-hw w-ʾdm-hw* “all the sons of ʿAmm, the free peasants and the vassals.” The Sabaic term *wfr* means “free peasants” (DAI Ṣirwāḥ 2005-50/1, Nebes 2016). A similar phrase is also attested in another Early Sabaic inscription. It reads: [*kl*] *wld ʿm wfr-hw w*[-*ʾdm-hw*] (RES 3234 = CIH 924). The Minaic *mwfr* means “terre de culture” (Arbach 1993 102), as does *mwfr* in Qatabānic (Ricks 1989; 53); cf. Gəʿəz *wafara* “go to a field (for any agricultural activity), go out into the countryside, feed in a pasture” is extended to “go anyplace.” See also *mufār* “farmland, pasture, village” (Leslau 1991: 606) and *mawfar* in Yemeni Arabic “Weg zwischen Feldern, an einem Kanalufer, Deichöffnung / Zufluß zu den Feldern” (Behnstedt 2006: 1309). See the Sabaic term *mʿmr* “memorial, cultic stone” (Sab. Dict., 17) and Arabic *ʿumra*. See Arabic *falaḥa* “to cultivate” and *fallāḥ* “plougher, tiller, or cultivator, of land” (Lane, 2439) and Aramaic *plh* “to serve a god” and *plḥ ʾlhʾ* “servant of the gods” (Hoftijzer/Jongeling 1995: 914).

[4] These is some valuable data on the pilgrimage practices of north Arabian tribes, especially from the Safaitic inscriptions. The root used here is /*ḥ-g-g*/, see Al-Jallad and Jaworska 2020: 85.

iv. S^{1}Bʾ

Finally, there is *s*^{1}*bʾ* “to carry out an undertaking, e.g., religious pilgrimage” (Sab. Dict.: 122; M-SAS 1). The Sabaic *ms*^{1}*bʾ* means “road; procession” (MB 2002 I-20).

v. QS^{1}D

The term *qs*^{1}*d* means “pilgrims” (Sab. Dict.:107; Ghul 1984: 33; Maraqten 2015: 112); cf. *qs*^{1}*d tʾlb* “pilgrims of (the god) Taʾlab” (Nāmī NN 19; RES 4176/7). The expression *qs*^{1}*d* is attested in a phrase as follows: *qs*^{1}*d s*^{2}*ʿbn s*^{1}*mʿy* “pilgrims of the tribe Sumʿay” (RES 4176/14).

vi. MʿD

The term *mʿd* “religious festival” is attested in Sabaic (Haram 13/1 = CIH 548/1).

II. Pilgrimage in ancient Yemen: A General View

The religious history of South Arabia is divided into two periods: polytheistic, from the beginning of the first millennium to around 380 CE, and then monotheistic. The South Arabian pantheon originally rested on an astral basis, with such deities as the sun goddess Šams, and ʿAṯtar, the supreme deity of all South Arabian kingdoms, who corresponds to the Assyro-Babylonian goddess Ištar, identified with Venus. Many deity names are mentioned in the inscriptions. Of importance are the “institutional” or national deities, related to the socio-political organization or kingdoms, such as the god Wadd in Maʿīn, Almaqah in Sabaʾ, ʿAmm in Qatabān and Siyān in Ḥaḍramawt (Höfner 1970; Müller 2002; Robin 2012: 7-118). Data on pilgrimages from ancient South Arabian inscriptions indicate both communal practices and rites exclusive to individual deities (Müller 2002: 178f.; McCorriston 2011: 58-73). The most important pilgrimage festival in ancient Yemen was undertaken for Almaqah, in a procession to the Awām Temple (Maraqten 2015: 107-33).

Further, the pilgrimage of Almaqah Ḏū-Hirrān at ʿAmrān (45 km northwest of Ṣanʿāʾ) and the pilgrimage on behalf of the god of the tribe Amīr, Ḏū-Samāwī, took place at Yaṯull and in the temple of Yaġrū and are documented in Sabaic inscriptions.

We are informed by several Sabaic texts about the pilgrimages on behalf of the god Ḏū-Samāwī (e.g., FB-wādī Shuḍayf 3/4). A passage reads *w-ḥgw ḏ-smwy b-yṯl* “and they performed the pilgrimage to Ḏū-Samāwī in Yaṯull”

(CIH 547/6). A royal pilgrimage is recorded as follows: *[1]šʿrm ʾwtr mlk s^{1}bʾ w-[2]ḏ-rydn bn ʿlhn nhfn m [3]lk sbʾ b-kn sbʾ l-ḥgg [4][ʾl]hn ʿdy mḥrmn ḏ-yġrw* "Šāʿirum Awtar, king of Sabaʾ and Ḏū-Raydān, son of ʿAlhān Nahfān, when he carried out an expedition to perform the pilgrimage of the god to the sanctuary Ḏū-Yaġrū" (Arbach 1993, Arbach 1996: 247).

Furthermore, pilgrimages to the local Sabaean deities, such as to the god Qaynān in Šibām, are also recorded. The pilgrimage of the god Qaynān took place at Šibām Suḫaym, north of Ṣanʿāʾ. This was possibly favored by women. A passage reads: *ḏkr ḥyws^{2}f bnt tḥyly ʾmt bn ʿṯkln k-ts^{1}bʾ [2]n w-mḍʾ ʿdy s^{2}bmm l-ḥḏr qynn* "A declaration of Ḥaywšāf, daughter of Taḥylay, female vassal of the clan Banī ʿUṯkulān, that she would carry out a journey and proceed into the city of Šibāmum to perform the pilgrimage of the god Qaynān" (M-SAS 1/1-2, Maraqten 2014b: 179-97).

Pilgrimages to other deities, such as to the Ḥaḍramī god Siyān, were also organized. Šammar Yuharʿiš (end of the third century CE), who was the first head of the Sabaʾ and Ḏū-Raydān federation to claim sovereignty of Ḥaḍramawt, sent a Sabaean mission to attend the festival of Siyān at Šabwa (Ir Appendix 3). This passage reads *l-qbly ḏ-blt ʾbs^{2}mr ʾwlṭ ʿdy hgrn s^{2}bwt l-qrb l-ḥḏr s^{1}yn* "In gratitude because he sent Abšamar Awlaṭ to the town of Šabwat to attend the festival of Siyān" (Ir 37 Ir II/31 /10-12, Sabaic).

We also have evidence from Minaic inscriptions. A phrase reads *w-ywm ḏbḥ ʿṯtr ḏ-Yhrq b-ḥḏr-s^1 ʾḏbḥm /10/* "and when they sacrificed to ʿAṯtar Ḏū-Yuhārīq during his festival 10 victims" (M 151/2 = RES 2929/2).

Data about pilgrimages are also gained from Qatabānic inscriptions. A phrase reads *ywm s^{1}bʾ w-s^{1}ḥḏr bʿl bs^{3}rm ʿd mḥrm-s^1 ṣnʿ* "when he carried out a pilgrimage to the Lord of Basarum in His temple Ṣanaʿ" (Doe 2/ 6-7).

Pilgrimages, both private and collective, were an ordinary feature of everyday life in ancient Yemen and continued through the medieval era until modern times, such as the pilgrimage to the Tomb of Hūd in Ḥaḍramawt, which has lasted to modern times (Daum 2015: 49-72).

III. The pilgrimage to the Awām Temple/Maḥram Bilqīs

The Awām Temple was the most important place of pilgrimage in pre-Islamic Yemen (Fig. 19-3, 19-4). Both men and women practiced the ceremonies of the pilgrimage. People of the Sabaean kingdom were ordered to join the communal pilgrimage at Awām. In addition to the central pilgrimage of the Sabaeans to Almaqah, Lord of Awām, at Maʾrib, the pilgrimage on behalf of the patron god of the tribe Sumʿay, Taʾlab Riyāmum at Mount Turʿat (modern-day Jabal Riyām, 50 km north of Ṣanʿāʾ) was one of the major pilgrimages in the kingdom of Sabaʾ (Ghul 1984: 33-39; Müller

1997: 89-110). However, the tribe Sumʿay were ordered in the statute of the god Taʾlab to attend the pilgrimage to Almaqah, Lord of Awām, at Maʾrib. A passage reads *l-k-ḏ ʾl yʿṭnn s¹mʿ b-ḏ-ʾbhy bn hḥḍrnʾlmqh ʿdy mrb* “that Sumʿay should not neglect in the month of Abhay to perform a pilgrimage to Almaqah in Maʾrib” (RES 4176/1-2). Mention should be made of the fact that the pilgrimage to Jabal Riyām in the pre-Islamic period is recorded by al-Hamdānī (Iklīl VIII, 99-101).

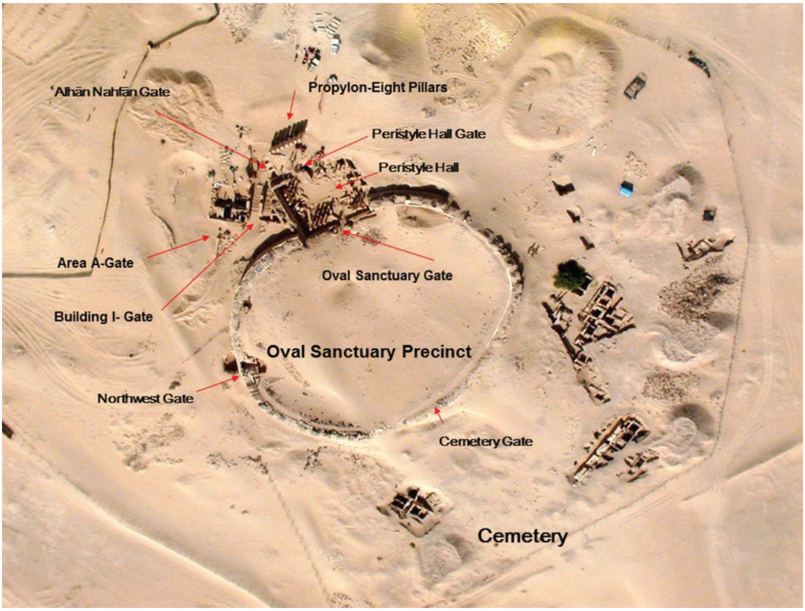


Fig. 19-3: Awām entrances.

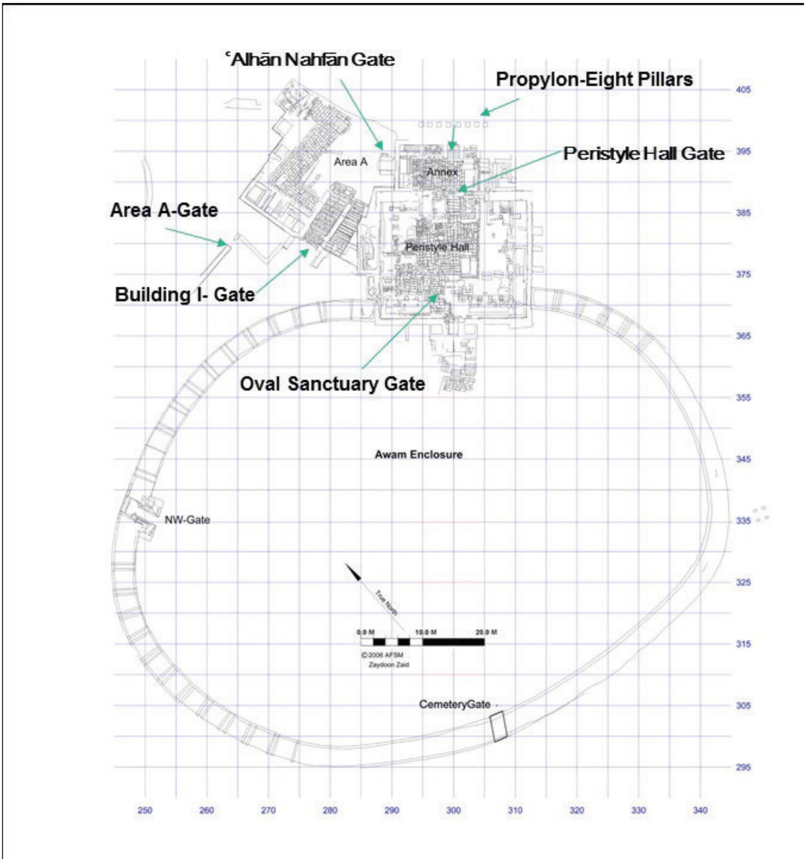


Fig. 19-4: Top plan – Awām Entrances.

We have little information about the possible pilgrimages to the Awām-temple in the early Sabaean period. However, an early Sabaic text stored in Ṣanʿāʾ at The National Museum (YM 375 = YM 1064) informs us about a priest carrying out a pilgrimage to Almaqah, which seems to have taken place at the Awām Temple.

Transcription:

1. *ys*^{3}*ql / bn / brr*
2. *m / brmyn / hqny*
3. *ns*^{1}*wr / ʿms*^{2}*fq / y*
4. *wm / rs*^{2}*w / wywm / h*

5. *wfr / mwfrt / ʾl*
6. *mqh / bʾbhy / bʾ*
7. *lmqh / wb / krbʾ*
8. *l / wb / nbṭyfʿ* |

Translation

1. Yasiqʾīl, son of Barīrum
2. Barmiyyān, dedicated to
3. Naswar ʿAmmšafaq,
4. when he served as a priest and when he
5. performed the pilgrimage of Almaqah
6. in (the month of) Abhay. By
7. Almaqah and by Karibʾīl
8. and by Nabaṭyafaʿ.

The most detailed information about the pilgrimage to the Awām Temple dates from the Middle Sabaic period, especially the 1st century CE to the middle of the 4th century CE. We have little information about the procedure of the pilgrims to Awām. However, it seems to be that the most important pilgrimage festival in ancient Yemen was undertaken for Almaqah in a ceremonial procession to the Awām Temple that started at the Ḥarūnum Temple in the city of Maʾrib and ended at Awām. This processional road connected the Ḥarūnum Temple in the city of Maʾrib with the Awām Temple; there, specific rituals connected with the pilgrimage were performed (MB 2002 I-20). This was also the route of the pilgrims who might have performed some ritual in the Ḥarūnum Temple, and then taken the Awām processional road to the Awām Temple. These worshippers would have congregated in a big open courtyard in front of the Northwest Gate (Maraqten 2004: 157-63).

As previously mentioned, access to the Awām complex was governed and controlled by gates leading to a hierarchy of courtyards. Apparently, the main pathway for worshippers from the beginning of the 1st century CE to the end of the 4th century CE was from the west side of the temple, via the passage in Area A (Maraqten 2015: 107-33).

Several texts from the Awām Temple record pilgrimage activities, primarily discovered in the Peristyle Hall (Fig. 19-5, 19-6). In one Sabaic text discovered at the Awām Temple, we have the following information about the pilgrimage: *w-l-h* [15]*wfrnn ʾṯt-hmw w-bn-hmw* [16]*ʿdy mḥrmn w-l-ḥmdnn mq*[17]*m ʾlmqhw* "and their wives and their sons would perform pilgrimage in the temple, and they would praise the might of Almaqah" (Ja 669/14-17).



Fig. 19-5: Peristyle Hall.

In a recently discovered 18-line Sabaic inscription from the Awām Temple, we are informed of a promised pilgrimage and an offering by a mother, both of which were fulfilled by her son. This passage reads: ... *lḏt s²ftt lhw ʾmhw ʾl* [4]*ḥlk ḏt mwrm kyʾtyn wh* [5]*ḥḍrn ʾlmqhwbʿlʾwm* … “In gratitude because his mother ʾĪl-ḥalak, of the clan Mawrum, had promised Him (i.e., Almaqah) that he would come and carry out a pilgrimage to Almaqah Ṯahwān, Lord of Awām” (MB 2005 I-52/3-5, Date: ca. 2nd-3rd century CE).

In a further newly discovered 15-line Sabaic inscription from this temple, we are informed of a pilgrimage to the Awām Temple and an offering by an individual wishing the birth of male children with lucky stars (*ʾḏkrm ḏkwkbt ṣdqm*, MB 2004 S I-62/11). A passage reads: … *ḏ-s²fthw k-* [7]*mʿnmw yẖmrn-hmw bnn ʾḏkr* [8]*m hnʾm k-yfrn w-yrḍḥn ʿdy mḥrmn ʾwm wyhqnyn* … “as soon as he (i.e., the dedicator) would grant them healthy male children, they would undertake a pilgrimage and bow down in the temple of Awām and make an offering” (MB 2004 S I-62/6-9).

A good example of the pilgrimage to the Awām Temple is MB 2004 I-109. This text records a thanksgiving for delivery from distress in childbirth. The owner of the text is a woman.



Fig. 19-6: Peristyle Hall inscriptions.

The text records a pilgrimage to the Awām Temple by this woman and the dedication of offerings to Almaqah (Fig. 19-7, 19-8). This inscription adds new data to our knowledge of the ritual activities of women at the Awām Temple. It is written in 12 lines and the measurements of the block and text are 31 x 22 cm. The inscribed limestone is a base for a statuette and its upper part is missing. Damage to both sides of the block, especially the upper right-hand corner, might have been done when the block was set into the pavement. The upper part and the Almaqah symbol are broken off. It is dated to the reign of Luḥayʿaṯat Yarḫum (230-235 CE).



Fig. 19-7: MB 2004 I-109 Location in the Peristyle Hall.

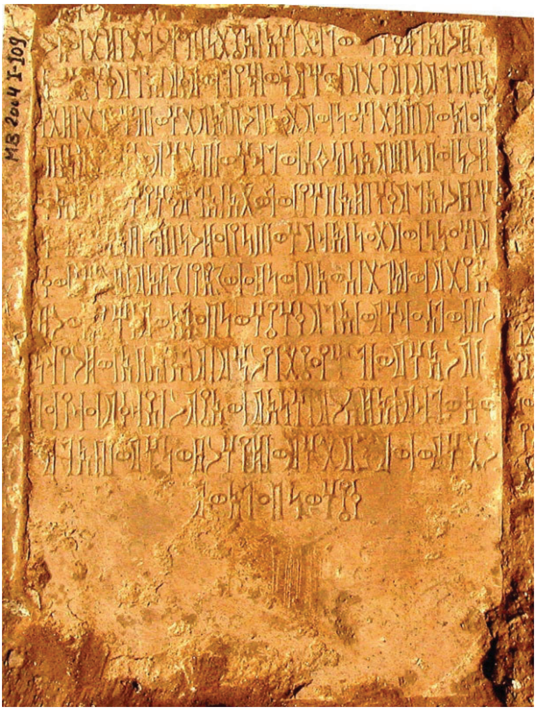


Fig. 19-8: MB 2004 I-109.

Transcription

1. [… *l*-]
2. *ḥḏr / ʾlmqh / l-wldt / hʾ / ʾṯtn / bḥrlt / ḏt / ʿḏr*
3. *n / glmm / mytm / w-ḥmdw / ḫyl / wmqm / ʾlmqhṯhwn*
4. *bʿl / ʾwm / bḏt / hʿn / w-mtʿn / grb / ʾmthw / bḥrlt / ḏt / ʿ*
5. *ḏrn / w-bn / ṭmʾn / nfs*^{1} */ wld-hw / b-thmw / …n / b*
6. *ḥḏr / ʾlmqh / ḏ-ʾbhy / w-l-wzʾ / ʾlmqh /* [*ṯhwn*] */ bʿl / ʾw*
7. *m / hʿnn / w-mtʿn / ʾdm-hw / bny / ʿḏrn / bn* [*/ bʾs*^{1}*tm / w-*]*n*
8. *kytm / w-mngt / s*^{1}*wʾm / w-nḍʿ / w-s*^{2}*ṣy / ʾns*^{1}*m / ḏ-rḥq / wq*
9. *rb / w-l-s*^{1}*ʿd-hmw / ʾlmqh / ṯhwn / bʿl / ʾwm / ḥẓy / wrḍ*
10. *w / mrʾ-hmw / lḥyʿṯt / yrḫm / mlk / s*^{1}*bʾ / w-ḏ-rydn*
11. *w-ʾwldm / ʾḏkrm / hnʾm / w-ʾṯmr / ṣdqm / ʿdy*
12. *ʿbrt-hmw / w-ms*^{2}*mt-hmw / ḏ-yhrḍyn-hmw / b-ʾlm*
13. [*qh / ṯhwn / bʿl / ʾwm*].

Translation

1. [xxx to perform]
2. the pilgrimage of Almaqah because that woman, Baḥar-Lāt of the clan of ʿAḏrān, brought forth
3. a stillborn male child; and they praised the power and might of Almaqah Ṯahwān,
4. Lord of Awām, because he protected and delivered the body of his handmaiden Baḥar-Lāt, of the clan of
5. ʿAḏrān, from the defilement of being in bed while giving birth, that with contaminating [xxx]
6. the pilgrimage of Almaqah in the month Ḏū-Abhay. And may Almaqah [Ṯahwān], Lord of Awām, continue
7. to aid and protect his subjects, the clan of ʿAḏrān, from [misfortune,]
8. mischief, bad luck, and harm of anyone, far or near.
9. And may Almaqah Ṯahwān Lord of Awām grant the favor and the goodwill
10. of their lord Luḥayʿaṯat Yarḫum, king of Sabaʾ and Ḏū-Raydān,
11. and bestow [upon] them healthy male children and fine crops in their
12. wadi-side cultivation and their fields that satisfy them. By Alm[aqah
13. Ṯahwān, Lord of Awām].

Commentary

Lines 1-2: As part of the inscription is lost, its full reconstruction, as indicated in the transcription, is not possible. Apparently, two lines from the first and last lines of the text are missing, and it is difficult to restore them. — [*l*]-*ḥḏr ʾlmqh*: the phrase *l-ḥḏr ʾlmqh* "to perform the pilgrimage of (the God) Almaqah" (Sab. Dict.: 157 ff., 66; Ryckmans 1973: 36-9). — *ʾṯt* (< *ʾnṯt*) common noun "woman, wife." — *bḥr-lt ḏt ʿḏrn:* The woman *bḥr-lt* is described as having married into the clan of ʿAḏrān (*ḏt ʿḏrn*). The phrase *ḏt* + clan name indicates this. — *bḥr-lt*, Baḥar-Lāt: The female proper name *bḥr-lt* is hitherto unattested in the ancient South Arabian onomasticon. It is a composite name which includes the theophoric element *lt*, the North Arabian goddess Allāt; Lātān (*ltn*) is the ancient South Arabian form of this goddess' name. The term *bḥr* means "to choose" and it is well attested in the ancient South Arabian onomasticon, cf. Sabaic *ybḥr-ʾl* (Tairan 1992: 234) and *ʾl-bḥr* in Qatabānic (Hayajneh 1998: 75f.). The theophoric element *lt* occurs several times in ancient South Arabian women's names (Sholan 1999: 162). — ʿAḏrān: The clan name *ʿḏrn* appears in other inscriptions (e.g., CIH 392/1). — *ġlmm mytm*: "a dead male child, still(born) male child." We have a similar formula, *bn mwld wldt ġlmm ḏkrm myt*[*m*] "(Almaqah delivered that woman) from the distressing childbirth in which she brought forth a stillborn male child" (CIAS 39.11, o 3 n 8/9). — *w-ḥmdw ḫyl w-mqm*: the noun *ḫyl* means "power, might; material resources" (Sab. Dict., 64). — *mqm* means "might, power, authority" (Sab. Dict., 111).
Lines 3-10: the term *ṭmʾ* means "defilement, s.t. ritually impure"; *hṭmʾ* "defile, make garment impure" (Sab. Dict., 153). — *nfs¹* "woman in childbirth" (Sab. Dict., 93), cf. Arabic *nifās* "confinement, to be in childbirth." — *b-thmw*: This word is derived from the root /*t-h-m*/. So far, it is not attested in South Arabian inscriptions; cf. Arabic *tahama* = *natana* "to have an offensive smell, be malodorous, stink" (Lisān, *thm*, 12/72); see also *natana* "it, flesh-meat, and milk became altered for the worse, and stank; it, flesh-meat had a foul odor; it stank (Lane 1983 [I]: 319).
Lines 11-13: *ʿbrt-hmw*, *ʿbr* "wadi-side cultivation, terraced fields" (Sab. Dict., 11). — *ms²ymt-hmw: ms²ymt* is plural of ms²m "cultivated area, field" (Sab. Dict., 136). We find a similar situation in another Sabaean inscription, which was also a dedication of thanks for delivery from sickness in childbirth [a.k.a. childbed fever] (CIAS II.49, 39.11 / o3, no. 8).

IV. Organization of the pilgrimage and protection of the pilgrims

Little information about the organization of the pilgrimage journeys is available. We have no information about pilgrims' caravans. It is possible that pilgrims joined trade caravans. A minuscule Sabaic text dealing with the circumstances of the pilgrimage of one person has been discovered (X.BSB 105 = Mon.script.sab. 124, Stein 2010: 374).

The management of the pilgrims and their feeding in Maʾrib, as well as their movement to the Awām Temple, seem to have been well organized by the Awām personnel, among whom we find several administrators and priests, such as the *rs*^{2}*w*/Rašū, /*qyn*/Qayn and *mʿhd*/Muʿāhid. The latter seems to have been the one who was responsible for taking care of and feeding the pilgrims. In a recently discovered inscription, an offering was dedicated to Almaqah by the *mʿhd ʾlmqh bʿl ʾwm* "treasurer of Almaqah, Lord of Awām" (2-3). In a further text from the Awām Temple we find a *mʿhd ʾlʾltn* "treasurer of the deities" (Sh 17/3-4).[5]

In a construction inscription that was engraved on the northern external wall of the oval wall, the two persons describe themselves as Muʿāhid of the Qayn, namely administrator of Almaqah. This phrase reads *Ḏmrkrb bn ʾbkrb bn S*^{2}*wḏbm w-S*^{1}*mhʾmr bn Tbʿkrb bn Rs*^{2}*wn mʿhdy qyn ʾlmqh b-ʾwm* "Ḏamarkarib son of ʾAbkarib ibn Šawdabum and Simhuʾamar son of Tubbaʿkarib descendant of Rašwan, the two treasurers of the administrator of Almaqah in Awām" (Ja 554).

The inscription refers to the security and protection of the pilgrims using the road. A passage reads: ^{1}*ḏt / ʾl / s*^{3}*n / ʾḫḏ / whʾbyn / kl / ʾns*^{1}*m / bn* ^{2}*ms*^{1}*bʾ / ʾwm / byn / ḥrwnm / wʾwm / wfrm / w* ^{3}*ʾtym* "It is not permitted to seize and to prevent anybody from the processional road of Awām between Ḥarūnum and Awām, neither one going forth [to Awām, i.e., as a pilgrim] nor one coming back [also as a pilgrim]" (Maraqten 2004: 157-63; Maraqten 2015: 116).

On occasion, the rulers of ancient Yemen took specific measures in order to ensure the safety of the pilgrims. Thus, some inscriptions deal with the safety and protection of the pilgrims using the road. On occasion, the rulers of ancient Yemen took specific measures in order to ensure the safety of pilgrims. Thus, an inscription informs us that a royal officer of king Šammar Yuharʿiš (early 4th century CE) was sent to Maʾrib *l-nẓr w-tnṣfn*

[5] Cf. Qatabānic *mʿhd ʿs*^{3}*trn* "Treasurer of ʿAstarān" (Kh-Ghawl Sālim 2, Noman 2012: 51) and *mʿhd qny Ḥwkm* "Treasurer of the property of Ḥawkam" (al-ʿĀdī 8/2, al-Hajj 2015: 168-203).

b-[17]*hgrn Mrb l-ḥḏr ʾbhy* "to take care of the performance of the rites of the pilgrimage in the city of Maʾrib during the period of the pilgrimage in the month Ḏū-Abhay" (Ja 651/16-17; cf. also Ryckmans 1973: 37f.).

V. Ritual rules and ceremonies of pilgrimage (*manāsik al-ḥağğ*)

We have good data about ritual rules and ceremonies of pilgrimage (*manāsik al-ḥağğ*) in ancient Yemen (Maraqten 2015), as well as a group of texts that provide further information about the regulations for visiting the temple (MB 1998 I-10). Prohibitions regarding allowing beasts to come into the sacred precinct of the Awām Temple also exist. Thus, if someone's beasts did go inside the temple, the owner of the beast was penalized and had to compensate the king (MB 2000 I-7).

Among these sources is the statute of the god Taʾlab Riyām, dated to ca. the 3rd century BC, providing detailed rules and regulations regarding the rites and ceremonies of the pilgrimage of Taʾlab, which can be described as *manāsik al-ḥağğ* par excellence (RES 4176, Müller 1997: 89-110, Müller 2002: 178, 255).

Of interest is the passage about the order of the god Taʾlab concerning the good behavior of the pilgrims. This passage reads as follows: *w-l-k-ḏ-ḥẓr tʾlb qsdm bn ḍbḥ b-bḍʿ-hw* "and that Taʾlab has banned the pilgrims from acting badly in his area" (RES 4176/2). Furthermore, the Sabaic text Haram 13 = CIH 548, which regulates the purity of the festival of the god Ḥalfān, belongs to this category.

i. Purity

Ritual purity (*ṭahāra*) is the foundation of the ritual of Almaqah upon which the performance of other rituals depended and was, therefore, the most important condition for the pilgrims to enter the Awām Temple (Fig. 19-9).

Among the forms of impurity in Sabaean society which were forbidden during the rites and ceremonies, as well as while visiting temples, and especially during the time of pilgrimage, were sexual impurity, sexual intercourse, menstruation, blood, dirty or impure clothing, pollution, defilement, women in childbirth, and being ill-smelling.

Access to the Sabaeans, sanctuaries were forbidden without specific conditions of ritual purity. We have good data about *ṭahāra* "ritual purity" from the recently discovered temple proscriptions concerning ritual purity, in the form of penitential and temple decrees at the Awām Temple dealing with this subject (e.g., MB 1998 I-10; MB 2002 I-28; MB 2005 I-58; MB

2005 I-88; MB 2005 I-89). The proscriptions concerning purity are engraved on a wall on the opposite side of the ʿAlhān Nahfān Gate and are thus visible to the visitors of the temple. The construction of water places for ablution and the purity proscriptions in decrees concerning entry to the Awām Temple demonstrate the respectful attitude among the Sabaeans as regards the purity of Awām (Maraqten 2015: 107-33).

Sabaean purity standards were practiced in a strict manner at the Awām Temple. This is expressed in terms of various temple decrees or proscriptions. Furthermore, Sabaic expiatory confession inscriptions give us some accurate details about the Sabaean purity system and defined sources of pollution. These penitential texts indicate that, if anyone entered a temple without ritual purification, they would be punished and would pay compensation (Ryckmans J. 1972: 1-15; Kropp 2002: 203-8).

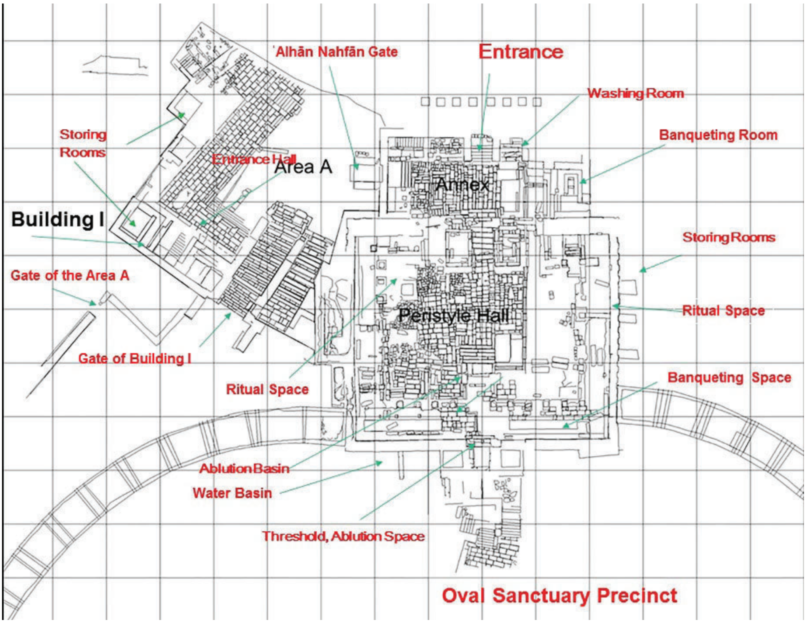


Fig. 19-9: Awām Complex. Detailed map of the Peristyle Hall, Building I and adjacent structures including ritual places and ablution areas (AFSM archive).

No one was allowed to enter the Awām Temple or any other ancient Yemeni temple without first being purified (*ṭhr*). The impure person is described as *ġyr ṭhr* (Haram 40 = CIH 523); *ġyr ṭhrm* (Haram 33 = CIH 532; see also Sab. Dict.: 153); *ʾl ẓy* (MB 2005 I-88/3) and *ʾl kyn ṭhrm* “without having

ritual purity" (MṢM 7250/6-7).[6] Ritual washings (*rḥḍ*), sometimes multiple ablutions (*iġtisāl*), were necessary for visitors; cf. *ʾl trḥḍ* "without ritual washing" (MB 2005 I-88/4). One who entered the sacred areas of the temple complex had to be clean both physically and spiritually (Maraqten 2015: 107-33).[7] Among the forms of impurity at Awām, the eating of onions or stinking plants prevented access to the Awām Temple, as we know from an inscription from Awām (Ja 720).

Access to Awām was strictly organized, and one had to go through different phases of purity depending on the different phases of holiness. In this temple, there are three locations for purification and making ablutions before approaching the temple and, in particular, before entering the Oval Sanctuary Precinct. The first one is in the Annex, where there seems to have been a room arranged for washing, perhaps *iġtisāl* or *ġusl* "ritual washing."[8] The second one is inside the Peristyle Hall, signified by a bronze basin. The third one is a bronze basin attached to the threshold of the entrance from the Peristyle Hall to the Oval Sanctuary Precinct. The latter was the essential station for ablution (Maraqten 2015: 124).

We have a good example relating to the Sabaean system of purity from the penitential text Haram 34 = CIH 533. It reads:

Transcription

1. *ʾmt ʾbh tnḫyt w-tnḏ*
2. *rn l-ḏ-S^{1}mwy bʿl byn b-h*
3. *n qrbh mrʾ ywm ṯlṯ*
4. *ḥgtn w-hʾ ḥyḍ w-ms^{2}y w-l*
5. *m yġts^{1}l w-ʿwdt mrʾ w-h*
6. [...]

Translation

1. Amatabīhā confessed and did penance
2. to Ḏū-Samāwī, Master of Bayn, because
3. a man had sexual intercourse with her in the third day of the
4. pilgrimage, when she was having her period, and then he went away and
5. he did not wash himself; and a man
6. […]

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[6] The phrase *ġyr ṭhrm* is attested primarily in relation to the god Ḏū-Samāwī (Haram 33/6-7 = CIH 532; Haram 40 = CIH 523; MṢM 7250/6-7).

[7] On Minaic expiation texts, see Agostini 2012: 1-12.

[8] The verbal form *ġts^{1}l* "wash oneself" in relation to ritual purity is known in Sabaic inscriptions (CIH 523/7; CIH 533/5).

Among the most important rules for pilgrimage rituals were the rules of pilgrimage purity. Carrying or using weapons during the festival, as well as other behaviors, were not allowed. This is illustrated in a Sabaic temple proscription (Haram 13 = CIH 548, Robin 1992: 78-81; Stein 2007: 37-38). The relevant part of this 17-line text reads as follows:

Haram 13 = CIH 548

1. *mn-(m) ḥmnm yḥrṭ s*^{1}*lḥm mʿd Ḥlfn*
2. *wḍʾm ʾw bhʾm k-ʾḫḏ b-mqs*^{1}*mm hn* |
3. *l-yngs*^{1}*n s*^{1}*lḥ-hw w-dmwm b-s*^{2}—
4. *yʿ-hw-(l)-y(ẓ)lʿn l-ʾlt ʿṯtr*
5. *w-ʾrs*^{2}*wwn ʿs*^{2}*r ḥyʾlym w-*
6. *hm lm ydmw l-*yẓ*lʿn ḫm*
7. *s*^{1} *ḥyʾlym ḏ-yndyn mrʾm* |
8. *mn mḥrmn l-yẓlʿn ḫms*^{1} *ʾs*^{1}
9. *lʿm* ...

Translation:

1. Whoever ... carry a weapon at the religious festival of Ḥalfān,
2. going out or coming in, if it is verified by the oracle that
3. his weapon is polluted and there is blood on
4. his dress, let him pay a penalty to the community of ʿAṯtar
5. and to the priests, ten *ḥayʾīl* -coins; and
6. if he is not defiled with blood, let him pay a penalty of five
7. *ḥayʾīl*-coins. Whoever pushes out a man
8. from the temple, let him pay a penalty of five
9. *silʿ*- coins …

ii. Processions

A recently discovered inscription from the Awām Temple, dating from the 2nd or 3rd century CE, informs us of a *ms*^{1}*bʾ ʾwm* "processional road of Awām" (MB 2002 I-20). According to the text, this road connected two Sabaean temples, Ḥarūnum, located inside the city of Maʾrib (beneath the Sulaymān mosque), and the *extra-muros* Awām Temple/Maḥram Bilqīs (Maraqten 2004: 157-63).

iii. Maʿlaṣ-Ritual

The root /*ʿ-l-ṣ*/ is attested several times in Sabaic within the ancient South Arabian inscriptions. From this root, the derivations *hʿlṣ* and *mʿlṣ* are attested.

The most attested is the verbal form *hʿlṣ*. The verbal form *hʿlṣ* is the causative form of the root /*ʿ-l-ṣ*/. The Sabaean root /*ʿ-l-ṣ*/ seems to be related to a common Semitic root, which is attested in Akkadian as *elēṣu* "to rejoice"; see also *mēleṣu* "joy (?)" (CAD E, 88, M 2, 12), "to swell; rejoice" (Black et al. 2000: 69); "schwellen, jubeln, jauchzen," (AHw, 200) and in Biblical Hebrew *ʿālaṣ* "frohlocken, jauchzen" (HAL, 791f.); cf. also Ugaritic *ʿlṣ* "rejoicing" (del Olmo Lete and Sanmartín 2002: 159), Punic *ʿlṣ* "to rejoice" (Hoftijzer and Jongeling 1995: 863).

Three possible meanings of the noun can be considered.

(1) The term *mʿlṣ* can possibly be considered as the "headdress" of bulls, which occur in South Arabian reliefs. A passage reads: *s¹ʿdlt ʾwkn w-s²rḥm w-rbbm w-klbm bnw tzʾd hqnyw s²ym-hmw ʾlmqh ṯhwn bʿl rṯwn< > ḏn ṯwrn w-mʿlṣ-hw* "Saʿadlāt ʾAwkan, Šārḥum, Rabībum and Kalbum of the clan Tazʾad have dedicated to their Patron Almaqah Ṯahwān, Lord of Raṯwān, this bull and headdress" (CIH 408/1-6). This custom of placing a headdress on bulls continued until modern times (Dostal 1983: 196-213).

(2) The Sab. Dict., 15 gives the possibility of the term *mʿlṣ* as "crops, cropland."[9]

A piece of evidence reads *ḥmdm* [*b-*]*ḏt sʿd-hw mʿlṣ ṣdqm kl ẖrft hʿlṣ* "in gratitude because He (i.e., Almaqah) granted him a successful good harvest in all the years he cultivates" (CIH 197/4-7, Rijziger 2018: 152-3).

(3) The third is the *mʿlṣ*-festival, which will be illustrated here. This occurs several times in the Sabaic texts. This can be seen in the following phrase:

A passage reads *w-l-qbl ḏ-hwfy-hw b-ḥḏr-hw ḏ-mʿlṣn ṯwrhw* "because He (i.e., Almaqah) granted for him his safety during his Maʿlaṣ-Festival (CIH 79/4.-5, Jändl 2009: 86-87).

Further evidence states: *l-qbl ḏt hwfyh* [4]*w b-ḥḏrhw ḏ-mʿlṣn w-b-ḏt sʿ* [5]*dhw ʾlmqh hyhrn b-ṯwrhw* "because He (i.e., Almaqah) granted for him his safety during his Maʿlaṣ-festival and because Almaqah granted him the success of his bull" (CIH 82/3-5, Jändl 2009: 88-89). [10]

Another passage reads [... *hw*]*fy ʿbd-hw msʿdm b-ʾmlʾ stmlʾ b-ʿm-hw b-mʿlṣn* "[because He (i.e., Almaqah)] granted His servant Masʿūdum in all the requests he requested from Him during the *mʿlṣ*-festival (CIH 93/1-2, Jändl 2009: 96-97).

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[9] The term *mʿlṣ* is considered by Al-Sheiba 1988: 54 and by Sima 2000: 147 as a toponym. In recent translations of the text CIH 82, the term *mʿlṣ* is considered as a name of a festival. See also Jändl 2009: 187.

[10] In recent translations of the text CIH 82, the term *mʿlṣ* is considered as a name of a festival. See Simpson 2002: 63, Nr. 31; Jändl 2009: 96-97.

A further passage reads *w-l-ḫmr-hw ʾtw b-wfym bn mʿlṣn* "in order that He (i.e., Almaqah) may grant him a safe return from *mʿlṣ*-festival" (CIH 352/6-7).

In a recently discovered inscription at the Awām-temple (MB 2004 I-158), we have further information about the *mʿlṣ*-festival or ritual, which might have been practiced as part of the ceremonies of the pilgrimage at the Awām-temple. A person made a dedication to Almaqah because he failed to perform the *mʿlṣ*-festival, possibly at Awām. The text informs us in line 8 about the reason for the dedication. Two reasons are mentioned by the dedicator in the text: (1) *l-qbly ḫṭʾt hḫṭʾ ʿbd-hw ʾlwfd ḏ-rms¹m* "because of the offense that His servant ʿIlwafad Ḏū-Ramsum has committed." (2) *l-qbly ḏ-ʾl hʿlṣ mlkn b-ḥ* [16]*ḍrhw* "because Mālikān did not perform the *mʿlṣ*-festival during his pilgrimage (MB 2004 I-158/15).[11]

In our text, the son of ʾĪlwafad, namely *mlkn*, Mālikān, did not perform the ritual of m*ʿlṣ* during their pilgrimage to Almaqah. Mālikān did not perform the rejoicing rituals and this was an offense against Almaqah. This is the second offense that had been committed by ʾĪlwafad.

It seems to be that *mʿlṣ* was a kind festival, where specific rituals were performed involving bulls. This seems to be a fertility or harvest festival. According to the evidence discussed above, it seems that the *mʿlṣ*-festival is related to the cult of the Sabaean god Almaqah. Possibly, this ritual belonged to the first stages of the preparation for the annual pilgrimage journey in Ḏū-Abhay.

iv. Prayers

Based on the Sabaic inscriptions that have been discovered in the Awām-temple, it is difficult to know what kind of prayers were practiced and if there were certain prayers for the pilgrimage. However, invocations of the god Almaqah, lord of Awām, are in almost every discovered text in this temple.

At the same time, four inscriptions that have been discovered in this temple represent a hymn or hymns. One of them, known as Zaid ʿInān 11 (ZI 11= MB 2004 I-94), has a total of twenty-three lines. It consists of a prologue and six strophes. Each strophe is comprised of four verses; every strophe has a rhyme and a distinct rhythm. The language is Sabaic and can be dated, according to its paleography, to the second half of the 3rd century CE (Maraqten 2015: 111).

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[11] There are difficulties in understanding the term *mʿlṣ*. The word *mʿlṣ* in our text is unlikely to be the agricultural term *mʿlṣ*, which the Sab.Dict., 15 gives the meaning as "? crops/ cropland."

v. Sacred Time: The pilgrimage month Ḏū-Abhay and sacrifice

In general, the sacred time and the cultic calendar are still in accord in ancient Yemen. However, of interest are the South Arabian month names, which are compounds with deity names such as the Minaic month's name *ḏ-ʾṯrt*, Sabaic *ḏ-ʿṯtr, ḏ-ʾlʾlt, ḏ-hbs*^{1} and *ḏ-ns*^{1}*wr* etc. and the Sabaic month's name *ḏ-mḥgtn* (Beeson 1956: 15-16; Höfner 1956: 46-54). It seems to be that these months were associated with religious festivals for these deities, possibly pilgrimages.

We do not have accurate knowledge about all the rituals and ceremonies that used to be performed by Sabaean pilgrims in the Awām-temple or the surrounding area. At the Awām-temple, however, specific rituals connected with the pilgrimage were performed. Actually, there were two types of major religious rituals at the Awām-temple—the communal pilgrimage, which was specifically performed in the month of Ḏū-Abhay, and the ordinary visit, which was carried out at any time of the year. While the pilgrimage of Ḏū-Abhay was similar to the pilgrimage of Ḏū-Ḥiǧǧa, the ordinary visit was similar to the Islamic *ʿumrah*.

When precisely was the month Ḏū-Abhay? According to J. Ryckmans and others, the pilgrimage month of Ḏū-Abhay was September. However, the study of C. Robin on the Sabaean calendar which depends on the bilingual Nabataean-Sabaic inscription, mentions the Nabataean month *ṭbt* in a context that corresponds with the month *ḏ-s*^{1}*bʾ* in the Sabaean calendar (Nebes 2009: 52-3). The month *ṭbt* is known to be December/January. The sequence of *w-s*^{1}*b* ^{7}*ʾ w-ʾlʾlt / w-ʾbhy* is already known from Ja 788+Ja 671/25. Thus, Ḏū-Abhay would correspond to February/March (Robin 2016: 366; Robin 2017: 347-349).

A recently discovered text mentions the sequence of seven months of the Sabaean calendar. This dedicatory inscription mentions the owner of the text was sick for seven months. This is the longest attestation of the sequence of the Sabaean calendar and reads as follows: *ln wr* ^{6}*ḫ ḏ-s*^{1}*ḥr w-hbs*^{1} *w-fls*^{1}*m w-ʿṯtr w-s*^{1}*b* ^{7}*ʾ w-ʾlʾlt / w-ʾbhy* "from the month Ḏū-Saḥar, Hōbas, Falsum, ʿAṯtar, Sabaʾ, ʾAlāʾilat and Abhay" (MB 2005 I-131). Our new text supports the thesis that the pilgrimage was performed in February/March.

Another question is, how long was the pilgrimage time? Apparently, the duration was eight days or possibly ten. The inscriptions engraved on the small sacrificial altars, which have been associated with pilgrimage, mention that the sacrifice was usually performed on the seventh of Ḏū-Abhay, while others mention the ninth of Ḏū-Abhay. This seems to have been the last phase of the pilgrimage ceremonies.

The people of the Sabaean federation were obligated to perform the annual national or religious assembly of Almaqah held at the Awām-temple in the month of Ḏū-Abhay, while other social components of the federation were also obligated to join. Thus, Taʾlab himself, the tribal patron god of the Sumʿay tribe that belonged to the Sabaean federation, commanded in his edict that members of Sumʿay undertake a pilgrimage to Almaqah in Maʾrib during the month of *ḏ-ʾbhy*, Ḏū-Abhay (RES 4176/1, RES 4176, Ghul 1984: 33-39; Ryckmans 1993: 366 ff.).[12]

Our knowledge of the sacrifices relating to pilgrimage at the Awām-temple is quite limited. However, there seems to have been a certain sacrificial rite associated with the pilgrimage. In general, people in ancient Yemen performed various services and dedicated their gifts to the deities as a thanksgiving, sin offering, peace offering, votive offering, etc. and at the same time conveyed wishes that the deities grant them prosperity, fertility and health.

Collective sacrifices took place in connection with the pilgrimages and—along with the burning of aromatics—at the inauguration of public buildings. Animal sacrifices are also well attested (Ryckmans 1993: 365-69; Maraqten 1994: 160-77). The main sacrificial place (*mḏbḥ*) seems to have been located in an open courtyard on the west side of the Northwest Gate, where huge quantities of animal bones and ash layers were found. The sacrifice of animals normally implies a certain rite associated with ceremonial meals of the pilgrimage. Apparently, another small sacrificial altar exists in the northwest corner of the Peristyle Hall (Maraqten 2015: 126-7). It is also possible that there were certain types of altars reserved for pilgrimages, such as the *mḥdrt*-altar (Maraqten 1994: 169).

As with the pilgrimage in Mecca, sacrifice was an important part of the pilgrimage festival, and sacrifices to the god Almaqah were made on a specific day, namely the seventh of Ḏū-Abhay, as is mentioned on some inscribed altars. In particular, the Sabaean pilgrimage sacrifice practices have similarities with the Islamic rites of *ʿīd al-aḍḥā* and the so-called *ayyām at-tašrīq* (the 11th, 12th, 13th of Ḏū Al-Ḥiǧǧa) in Minā at the end of the rituals of the Islamic pilgrimage.

Several inscribed altars have been discovered, which seem to have been put in the service of the pilgrims to sacrifice in the last stage of the pilgrimage.

Although these small inscribed sacrificial altars, primarily made of limestone, are of unknown provenance, most of them seem to have originated

[12] See the detailed study of this text by Müller 1997: 89-110. On Taʾlab as a god of pastures, see also the inscriptions Gl 1142 and Gl 1143 and Höfner 1954 and Beeston 1955: 154-6.

from the Awām-temple. The majority of them display the symbol of Almaqah, engraved on the upper right corner, and mention the pilgrimage month of Ḏū-Abhay. This symbol is primarily associated with Almaqah, Lord of Awām.

At the same time, there are a couple of sacrificial altars that have been discovered mostly in the pavement of the Peristyle Hall and it has not been possible to check whether or not they are inscribed (Fig. 19-10).



Fig. 19-10: Sacrificial altar, discovered in the Peristyle Hall (AFSM, Archive).

Of significance is the fact that families used their own altars during pilgrimages. These were an important part of the pilgrimage festival, and occurred during the month of Ḏū-Abhay.

Several examples are presented here:

(1) *mḏbḥt* s^2*h* ^{2}*w b-*s^1*bʿm ḏ-ʾbhy* “sacrificial altar of Šāhw on the seventh day of Ḏū-Abhay” (CIH 694).

(2) *mḏbḥt ʾly ẖ*[... ...] ^{2}*mm b-ywm* s^1*bʿm ḏ-*[*ʾbhy*] “sacrificial altar […] on the seventh day of Ḏū[-Abhay]” (CIH 696).

(3) *mḏbḥt ʿbdm w-bny-hw bny* s^1*qrn ʾdm ḏ-ʿqbn* ^{2}*ḏt b-ʿly-h ymẖ*s^1*nn b-*s^1*bʿm ḏ-ʾbhy w-rṯd-h-ʾlmqh* “sacrificial altar of ʿAbdum and his sons, Banū Saqrān, vassals of Ḏu-ʿĀqibān, on which they will

slaughter on the seventh day of Ḏū-Abhay and he committed it to Almaqah” (Ṭayrān 2003: 247-68).

(4) *mḏbḥt bn Hws^{2}ḥ* [... ...]*t ^{2}s^{1}ʿm b-ḏ-ʾbhy* “sacrificial altar of the family Hawšaḥ […] on the ninth of Ḏū-Abhay” (CIH 670).

(5) *mḏbḥt b^{2}ny ḏ-Mrḥbm ^{3}l-ḏ-Ġmmm* “sacrificial altar of clan Banī Marḥabum for the (god) Ḏū-Ġamāmum” (CIH 674).[13]

(6) *mḏbḥt ^{2}ḏ-Yṯʿn ^{3}l-ḏ-Ġmmm* “sacrificial altar of clan Ḏū-Yaṯʿān for the (god) Ḏū-Ġamāmum” (RES 3627 = Gl 487).

(7) *mḏbḥt bn L ^{2}ʾymm ʾḥnnn* “sacrificial altar of clan Banī Laʾyāmum from Ḥanān” (CIH 676).

(8) *mḏbḥt ʾbkrb bn ʾs^1 ^{2}dʾl w-rṯd mḏbḥt-h ʾlmq^{3}h* “sacrificial altar of Abkarib, son of the family Asadʾīl, and he committed his sacrificial altar to Almaqah” (RES 4086 = Gl A 682).

(9) *mḏbḥt bn Hws^{2}ḥ w-bn Ġzylm w-(bn) H[w] ^{2}fʿm b-ḏ-ʾbhy* “sacrificial altar of the family Hawšaḥ and the family Ġuzaylum and the family Hawfāʿam in Ḏū-Abhay” (RES 4482 = Gl 653).

(10) *mḏbḥt ʾlʾwh bn Ṣbḥhmw Gḏwyn w-rṯd-h ʾlmqh* “sacrificial altar of ʾIlʾawah, son of Ṣubhumū the Gaḏwanite, and committed it to Almaqah” (RES 4483).

(11) *mḏbḥt bn Wʿṣm w-bny Ḥywm b-ḏ ʾbhy* “sacrificial altar of the family Waʿṣum and the clan Ḥaywum in Ḏū-Abhay” (RES 4484 = Gl 655).

(12) *mḏbḥt b-h yḏbḥn mlkn ṯwrm b-ywm tsʿm ḏ-ṯwr* “sacrificial altar whereon the king offers the sacrifice of a bull on the ninth day of the month Ḏū-Ṯawr” (CIH 671= RES 3104).

(13) *mḏbḥt bny rs^2 ^{2}wn bkl ns^{2}qm* “sacrificial altar of the clan Banī Rašwan in the whole area of Našqum” (MM I-16, Early Sabaic, Fig. 19-11).[14]

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[13] Ḏū-Ġamāmum seems to have been an epithet of Almaqah.

[14] This inscribed block belongs to a private collection in Maʾrib and is published here for the first time. Photo courtesy of Mohammed Maraqten. The clan *rs^{2}wn* based in Našq is mentioned in the text Demirjian 1/1.



Fig 19-11: Maraqten Marib 16.

Summary

This study demonstrates that pilgrimage was an important institution in ancient Yemen. The concept of the pilgrimage at the Awām Temple has many similarities with the Ḥaram of Mecca, particularly with regards to rituals and ideas of purity associated with the pilgrimage.

Although we have some good data about pilgrimage rituals from the recently discovered inscriptions, many details of practices associated with the rituals of pilgrimage are still ambiguous.

References and Abbreviations

CSAI Corpus of South Arabian Inscriptions: http://dasi.humnet.unipi.it.

Ja Sabaean inscriptions published in Jamme 1962.

MB Registration siglum of inscriptions discovered by the American Foundation for the Study of Man (AFSM) excavations at Maḥram Bilqīs (1998–2006).

For further Abbreviations, sigla, and bibliography of cited inscriptions see Kitchen 2000 and CSAI.

Figures 19.1, 19.3-19.10 from the AFSM archive.

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CONTENTS